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SERMON XXVIII.

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CONCERN FOR THE SPIRITUAL WANTS OF MEN.

PHILIPPIANS, ii. 20.—*I have no man like minded, who will naturally care for your state.*

THE rare and exalted character, which St. Paul here sketches at a single stroke, belongs to Timothy. The passage which contains it appears to have been written at a time when the apostle was particularly solicitous to obtain correct information respecting the state of the Philippian church. He was unable to visit Philippi himself. He could not immediately send Timothy; and among the persons then around him, there was no other on whose concern for the welfare of the church he could rely.

This passage suggests several remarks which have a direct and important bearing upon the object of the present discourse.

I. The first remark suggested by the passage is, *That the situation of mankind, in a moral and religious view, is such as ought to awaken the unaffected concern of good men.*

This proposition is, I conceive, fairly deducible from our text. The apostle evidently supposed it to be necessary that some one should care for the state of the Philippian church. Yet neither in this epistle, nor elsewhere, does he intimate that there was any thing peculiar in their situation, which rendered it more necessary to care for them than for others. On the contrary, that church appears to have been at this time in a remarkably flourishing state. It was furnished, as we learn from the introduction to the epistle, with pastors and subordinate officers. Of course, it enjoyed all the means of grace. Its members had recently given the apostle proofs of their affectionate remembrance, and their liberality, by sending him pecuniary supplies; and he expresses a strong persuasion, that God had begun a good work in them, and that he would perform it unto the day of Christ Jesus. Now if such a church, if persons professedly and hopefully pious, favoured with the enjoyment of Christian privileges, and disposed to improve them, still needed some one to care for their state, how imperiously does the situation of a very large proportion of our fellow-beings call for attention and concern? If it were necessary to corroborate this remark, it might easily be done. From the immense mass of information which has been collected and embodied by a zealous few, who care for the state of

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perishing men, it would be easy to select a multitude of the most alarming facts, illustrative of the moral and religious situation of the world;—facts sufficient to convince insensibility itself, of the necessity of vigorous exertion, and to rouse the most torpid into activity.

But, can it be necessary to do this, after such a flood of light has been poured upon the situation of the dark places of the earth; bringing afresh to our view the fact long known, but little regarded, that they are filled, not with the habitations only, but with the temples and altars of cruelty and lust? Must we again lead you through the recently explored, and almost immeasurable wilds of paganism; again measure the length and breadth of this Arabian Desert of the moral world; again show you six hundred millions of immortal beings sitting in the darkness and shadow of death; and place before you the new-born infant sacrificed, or exposed by its parents; the widow's funeral pile; the blood-stained car of Juggernaut; with other sickening scenes from which even unsanctified nature recoils? Or, escaping from those regions of moral death to the shores of our own comparatively favoured land, must we repeat the calls which have so often summoned you to survey the waste places of her Zion, and to explore her moral wildernesses? Must we repeat the melancholy truth, that a large proportion of our countrymen are destitute of stated religious instruction, and that in consequence of the unexampled increase of our population, this deficiency is annually increasing, notwithstanding all the exertions which are made to supply it?

With these facts, and with the Bible before us, can any thing farther be requisite to prove that the religious state of a very large proportion of mankind is such as demands the most active, unremitting concern? If this be not the case, why has the all-wise God lavished such a profusion of care upon us? Why did he send his Son into the world? Why did his Son send forth disciples? Why direct them to pray the Lord of the harvest, that labourers might be sent forth into his harvest? Why was it his last command;—"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature?" Why did his first gift, after his ascension to heaven, consist of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, sent expressly to care, to watch for the souls of men? Why did those apostles ordain elders in every city? Why charge those to whom they left the care of the churches to commit the things which they had received to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also?

Has all this provision for the spiritual wants of men ceased to be necessary? Has such a change taken place in their character and condition, that watchmen are no longer needed? Are the enemies which once opposed their salvation dead, or asleep, or converted to friends? Does the broad road no longer lead to destruction? Are the fires of hell extinguished? Are the glories of heaven departed? Or, has the long expected day arrived in which it is no longer necessary to "teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord?"

No, my Brethren, we have around us but too many proofs that this is not the case. You well know that the moral state of our race is still essen-

tially the same as in the days of the apostles: that the dangers to which they are exposed are still as great, and the enemies that oppose their salvation as numerous, as artful, and as powerful as ever; and that, therefore, they still need faithful watchmen to care for their souls. Has not experience taught you, my brethren, that such watchmen are necessary for yourselves? If so, remember, they are no less necessary to others. And if they are thus necessary, then care and exertion are requisite to provide them. By whom shall this care be exercised, this exertion made? Will you reply, By those whose necessities require them? And is it, then, needful to remind you, that by them it will never be done? Have not observation and experience taught you, that men are never more insensible to their spiritual wants, than when those wants are most numerous and pressing? This, this is the circumstance, which, above all others, renders it necessary to care for the spiritual state of mankind. They will not; no, they will not care for themselves. When would the Son of God have made his appearance in our world, had he waited till its prayers drew him down? When would he have sent his apostles to the heathen, had he waited till they solicited such a favour? And when, O Christian, would the Spirit of God have visited your heart, had he waited till it became spontaneously desirous of his presence? Why then should we expect the present inhabitants of the world to be more spiritually wise, more concerned for their eternal interests, than former generations, or than we ourselves have been? Like the merciful God, we must have compassion on those who have no compassion on themselves, and listen to the speechless cry of their necessities.

But why do I insist on this obvious truth? From many of the destitute an imploring cry is already heard. Wakened by the still small voice of God, or by the occasional warning of some transient messenger of the cross, they are becoming sensible of their wants, and beseech us to care for them. Hundreds and thousands would at this moment receive with gratitude and joy the fragments, the crumbs of your spiritual repasts. They cry for the bread of life, but there is none to break it to them. To provide a supply for themselves is beyond their power. And even if it were not so—if all the destitute in our own country and in the world possessed the disposition and the ability to care effectually for themselves, who is to care for posterity—for *your* posterity? Who is to make the *present* exertions which are necessary to preserve them from suffering a famine of the word of God? Of this, chimerical as the apprehension may appear, there is no small nor doubtful danger. Only suffer things to pursue their present course, and it is certain that your descendants, at no very distant day, will experience the fulfilment of that awful threatening; "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send a famine upon the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the word of the Lord." You can, in some faint degree, conceive of the miseries attendant upon a famine of bread, though the unmerited goodness of God has never permitted you to witness them. But what are these in comparison with the evils occasioned by a famine of the *bread of life*? As far inferior, as is

corporeal pain to mental anguish; as is the death of the body, to that of the soul; as are a few days of suffering to an eternity of wretchedness. To witness these evils, is to see the moral wilderness, with all its briars and thorns, its wild beasts and noxious reptiles, rapidly encroaching upon the vineyard of God. It is to see our golden candlesticks successively removed out of their places, and one burning and shining light after another extinguished; while none are set up in their room to dispel the hourly increasing darkness. It is to see the ways of Zion mourn because few come to her solemn feasts; the houses of God decaying, shut up, or desecrated; the temples of vice multiplying; the barriers which protect the sanctity of the sabbath prostrated; the Bible cast aside and forgotten as a useless book; the exertions of religious and charitable institutions suspended, and even their existence terminated; the few remaining disciples of Jesus destitute of strength, of activity, and almost of life, constantly diminishing in number; the rising generation growing up without God and without hope; and darkness which may be felt overspreading the land; while an insulted God, looking down from above, commands the clouds to rain no rain upon it, and pronounces it a spot rejected, and nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned. Such are some of the effects which result from a famine of the word of God; such the evils under which a large proportion of our own country and of the world now groans. If we wish either to remove this most terrible of God's judgments from those who are now suffering it, or to avert it from our posterity, immediate and vigorous exertion is indispensably necessary.

Will any one reply, These apprehensions are groundless? It is impossible that in our country, or at least in the most highly favoured parts of it, the gloomy scenes which have been portrayed should ever be realized? My brethren, let no one be too confident of this. Must I remind you that every spot occupied by the Church on earth is a spot which, like the territory of Holland, has been won from an ocean; and that nothing but an adequate mound can prevent that ocean from reclaiming what it has lost? This mound consists, under God, in a faithful and well educated Christian ministry. Remove this, or neglect to repair the breaches which are constantly making in it, and you will soon see the billows, whose rage it even now scarcely restrains, bursting upon you with irresistible violence, and sweeping away the labours of ages in a day. Where are now the seven churches of Asia, which rose and smiled like so many verdant islands amid the surrounding waves? Go to Asia, or take up the glass of history, and see.

II. A second remark, suggested by our text, is this: *Men who properly care for the spiritual state of their fellow-beings are rarely to be found.*

This was the case in the days of St. Paul. It has been so ever since; and, we are constrained to add, it is so still; though, blessed be God, in a less degree than formerly. Will any one attempt to disprove this assertion by referring to the numerous societies which have been formed, to the sums which are collected, to the zeal and activity which are displayed for the promotion of almost every religious object? To every thing which can be urged of this nature, I would allow its full weight. That much has been

done, that much is now doing to meliorate the moral condition of man, is readily acknowledged. Still there exists, I conceive, ample foundation for the remark, that men who are suitably concerned for the spiritual condition of their fellow-beings are very rarely to be found. It must be recollected that warmth and coldness are relative terms, no less in the spiritual than in the natural world. Our climate might be thought warm by a visiter from Nova Zembla; but how would it appear to a native of the torrid zone? So to us, natives of this frozen world, the present temperature of our spiritual climate may appear sufficiently high. But how would it appear to an inhabitant of heaven, were he condemned to reside among us? How would it appear to our benevolent Saviour, should he revisit the earth? Would he not find it intolerably chilling? Would he not regard the warmest love, the most fervent zeal, which are to be found among us, as comparatively cold? Would he not tell us that in comparison with what ought to have been done, almost nothing has been done?

And, to allude to a term employed by our translators in the text, how small a portion of that which is done appears to be done *naturally*? How much of the concern displayed for the destitute is *artificial*; how much of it is *forced* into action; what exertions, what importunities, what appeals to every principle of our nature are required to procure even the most scanty supply for their necessities? Alas, my Brethren, were the fervent apostle of the Gentiles now on earth, labouring, as he was wont for their salvation, would he not too often have occasion to address them in the language before us—"I have no man who will *naturally* care for your state?"

III. It will not perhaps be departing from our subject, certainly not from our object, to notice *some of the principal causes of this unconcern*: For a knowledge of the causes of existing evils is often necessary to their removal.

Of these causes, one is an inordinate and criminal *self-love*. To this cause the apostle ascribed the deficiency of which he complained. "All," says he, "seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." It is needless to remark, that this cause still operates with undiminished force. It is frost in the heart, and a palsy in the hand. It draws around us a magic circle, beyond which our affections and exertions with difficulty pass. It presents to our eye a false glass, through which our own interests appear immeasurably important, and the interests of others comparatively trifling. It is ever suggesting some scheme of self-gratification, or self-aggrandizement, which engrosses, and exhausts the vigour of the soul, and leaves nothing but spiritless languor for plans of benevolence. In a word, it prompts us to care so much for ourselves, that we find little leisure or disposition to care for others.

This cause, however, prevalent and operative as it is, does not alone appear sufficient to produce all the evils of which we complain. It does not, except in some few instances, prevent us from relieving the wants of the body. Why then should it prevent us from relieving the far more pressing wants of the soul? The most selfish individual among us would scarcely suffer a beggar to famish and expire at his gate. Yet how many, who are by no means slaves to avarice, suffer their immortal fellow-beings, while

within hearing of their cries, to expire under the pressure of spiritual famine! Inordinate self-love, then, however prevalent, is not alone sufficient to account for the existing indifference to the religious interests of mankind. We must seek a still more general and operative cause; and such a cause we may find in the prevalence of *unbelief*. We do not, my brethren, properly believe the account which inspiration gives us, of the spiritual state of mankind. Still less do we believe its awful descriptions of the fate of those who die in their sins. Did we fully credit the declarations of God, relative to these subjects; did we, like the apostle, *know the terrors of the Lord*; concern for the spiritual state of sinful men would be one of our main-springs of action; and to effect their salvation would be the great object of our exertions. Were such a belief universally prevalent in Christian countries, it would engage their whole population in one grand, combined effort, to rescue slaves of ignorance and depravity from impending ruin. Comparatively speaking, no tears would then be shed for merely temporal calamities; for they would be regarded as light afflictions, and not worthy to be compared with that far more exceeding and eternal weight of wretchedness, which must overwhelm the impenitent. Natural sympathy alone would then do more for the salvation of mankind, than Christian benevolence has ever done since the days of the apostles. This is not mere conjecture; it is a conclusion founded on facts. For, look at the scenes which were exhibited in Europe, during those dark ages, when men really believed the dogmas and superstitions of papal Rome. See the churches which were erected, the convents which were endowed, the treasures which were lavished, the numberless masses which were said, and the almost endless succession of prayers which were offered, for redeeming departed souls from the purgatorial miseries they were supposed to be suffering. Had all the exertions thus made, to redeem sinners from a fancied purgatory, been employed under the direction of an enlightened zeal, in arresting their progress to a real hell, every nation on earth would now be enjoying the benefits of a preached gospel, and the Bible would be in the hands of every individual of our race. And why is this? Why has superstition possessed, apparently, greater power to touch the heart and open the hand, than faith has had, at least in these latter ages of the church? Because, I answer, our faith is so weak that it scarcely deserves the name. Because the papists did, in one sense, believe the existence of a purgatory; and we do not, or act as if we did not really believe the existence of a hell. Brethren, these things ought not so to be. As far as the sufferings which we believe to await impenitent sinners beyond the grave, surpass in magnitude and duration those fancied sufferings which excited the compassion, and called forth the exertions of papal devotees, so far ought we to surpass them in our efforts; and so far we should surpass them, did we properly believe the declarations of eternal truth. We should then feel, that he who prevents but one immortal from incurring those sufferings, takes more from the mass of human misery, and adds more to the sum of human happiness, than would he, who should banish sorrow from the earth, and secure the highest temporal felicity of the whole human race.

It must, however, be acknowledged that there is another cause of sinfulness and inaction, which, perhaps, affects those most powerfully, who are least affected by the causes mentioned above; and that is *despondency*. When the persons, to whom we now refer, contemplate the situation and prospects of sinful men, as portrayed by the pencil of inspiration; when they survey the mighty mass of human wretchedness, together with the apparently insurmountable obstacles which oppose its diminution, and the many powerful causes which are ever operating to increase it, they are overwhelmed, crushed, and paralyzed. They feel like men required to empty the ocean, by the daily removal of a drop, while a thousand rivers are incessantly pouring into its bosom. All that their utmost exertions can effect, appears so much like nothing, that they almost resolve to attempt nothing, and to say that nothing can be done.

It appears, then, that the three great causes, to whose influence all our unconcern for the spiritual wants and miseries of mankind is to be ascribed, are *selfishness*, *unbelief*, and *despondency*. And by which of these, my hearers, permit me to ask, can you consent to be influenced? Shall it be *selfishness*? Is any one willing to acknowledge, even to himself, that he is controlled by a principle so base? Is any one prepared to say as follows, 'I renounce all pretensions to that charity which seeketh not her own; all pretensions to any union of feeling with the benevolent Redeemer; or any similarity of character to those whom he approves and rewards; and when the great Husbandman gathers in the immortal harvest, it shall not be said, that any of the seed which produced it was sown by my hand, or watered by my tears?' If this language appears too shocking to be adopted, will any one say, 'Selfishness shall not control, but it shall counsel me; it shall not entirely repress, but it shall limit my exertions? It shall preserve me from the dangers into which a too ardent charity might plunge me, and prevent its sacred flame from rising too high.' My brethren, if any of you are in danger of loving your neighbour more than yourselves, of surpassing in benevolence the Son of God, or even of exceeding his apostles, it may perhaps be necessary to ask the advice of this base counsellor. But if no such danger exists, its advice may safely be dispensed with. And if no one is prepared to utter such sentiments in language, let no one express them in action.

Shall we then yield ourselves to the palsying influence of *unbelief*? Shall we plead a disbelief of God's declarations, as an excuse for disobeying his commands? Even if we disbelieve, or explain away the declarations of scripture, relative to the present and future state of sinners, how shall we evade the no less plain and forcible language of *facts* which it records. The plain, the undeniable inference from all these facts is, that the situation of mankind without a Saviour, without a knowledge of the gospel, is unspeakably dangerous. Nor can this inference be avoided, unless we assert, that neither the apostles, nor our Saviour himself, knew any thing of the matter. Unless we are prepared to assert this, we must, with the apostle, judge, *that since one died for all, then were all dead*; that if Christ died to redeem men from the *curse of the law*, from the *wrath*

to come, from the power of sin, and from spiritual wickedness in high places, then to all these evils and dangers are men exposed.

Yielding to the impressive language of these facts, and escaping from the insensibility of unbelief, shall we then plunge into the dead sea of *despondency*?—Believing the threatenings, shall we inconsistently disbelieve the promises of revelation, and forget the faithfulness and omnipotence of Him who has said to his Son, *I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession*? Could a Roman exhort his countrymen not to despair of the commonwealth; and shall we despair of the kingdom of Christ, supported and defended as it is, by the eternal purpose and oath of Jehovah? We talk of difficulties; but what are difficulties to Omnipotence,—to Him who speaks and it is done? Away then with every desponding thought: and while you contemplate a world in wickedness, remember who hath said, *The knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the seas*.

And now, who is prepared to deny that the principles, which lead to this melancholy unconcern for the spiritual wants of men, are base, sinful, and utterly unworthy of rational, social beings? Will you not, then, by displaying an enlightened, active, and liberal concern for your destitute fellow-men, evince your freedom from the power of such principles; and efficiently patronize the Society in whose behalf I address you?

With the great object of this Society you are already acquainted. By educating pious, indigent youth, of promising talents, for the gospel ministry, it seeks to supply the melancholy and alarming deficiency of religious teachers, which exists in our own country, and in the world. Including among its friends and supporters, Christians of different religious denominations, it aims at nothing less than furnishing all our destitute fellow-men, at home and abroad, with a well educated and pious ministry. Without derogating from the importance of other benevolent objects which claim and receive the support of the friends of religion and mankind, it may be said with truth, that the object of this Society is second in importance to no other. Its success is essential to the success of every other object of a religious nature. The exertions of Missionary societies must be circumscribed and paralyzed, unless suitable men can be obtained to be employed as Missionaries. The distribution of the Bible will effect but a comparatively small part of the good which it is designed and calculated to produce, if its contents are not explained by able and faithful interpreters, giving voice and utterance to its solemn truths, and pressing them upon the heart and conscience. Already are the scriptures in the hands of thousands, who, were they asked in the words of Philip to the Ethiopian nobleman, *Understandest thou what thou readest*? would be constrained to reply with him, *How can we, except some one should guide us*? It is by *hearing*, rather than by reading the word, that faith comes. It is by the "foolishness of preaching, that it pleases God to save them that believe." But "how can they hear without a preacher? and how can they preach except they be sent?" And who is, to send them, if we do not? By educating pious, indigent youth for the ministry, we shall instrumentally

send many into the vineyard of our Lord, who, without our assistance, will never enter it: We shall aid Bible and Missionary societies, by furnishing the former with skilful interpreters, and the latter with faithful labourers. In a word, we shall put in motion the means which God has appointed for the salvation of men; means which he will therefore crown with success.

Nor are these, though the principal, the only beneficial effects which the efforts of this Society are calculated to produce. They have a powerful tendency to promote the best interests of our literary institutions. I need not inform those of you, who are acquainted with seminaries of learning, of the many temptations to which the youthful student is exposed from examples of indolence and vice. Nor need I remind you of the anxiety, which parents often feel, while reflecting on the necessity of exposing their children to these dangers. Now, how much must it tend to remove the causes of this anxiety, to introduce into our seminaries, annually, a number of youth distinguished for morality, piety, and diligence in literary pursuits? It would be purifying these fountains. It would be tincturing the streams which are to flow through our country, with ingredients of the *river of life*. Should no other beneficial effects result from the efforts of this Society, these alone would be sufficient to repay abundantly all our contributions and exertions for its support.

Again, the rapidly increasing population of the newly settled portions of our country is soon to give them a preponderating influence in our national councils. They will soon make our laws. Is it not then inconceivably important, in a political as well as religious view, that the men who are to exert such an influence, should early adopt the principles, and form the habits which belong to a truly Christian community? But this they will not do, if they are not furnished with the institutions of Christianity. It may be thought by some that the Society is designed to promote exclusively the interests of a particular denomination. But to this it will be a sufficient reply, that its patronage has been extended to young men of five different religious denominations, the natives of widely distant States, and dispersed through almost all the seminaries of learning in our country. Will it be said, that some of the youth patronized by the Society may prove unworthy of the assistance afforded them? This is doubtless possible: for what human plans and exertions are not liable to be frustrated? But such is the care and precaution which is observed by those who are intrusted with the management of the funds, in selecting objects of patronage, that instances must be rare indeed in which the funds can be misapplied. The improvements which have recently been made in the system of the society, by which a minute and faithful supervision is exercised over those who are patronized, in every stage of their education, renders this security still greater, and as great probably as the nature of the case admits.

And now, my brethren, with these facts before you, what will you say? or rather what will you do? I am aware that the calls upon your liberality are many and great; but they are calls which it seems impossible to disregard. They are the calls of immortal beings, perishing for want of the

assistance which it is in your power to afford. They are the expiring, agonizing calls of a drowning world: a world deluged by a flood of ignorance and misery, far more terrible than all the waters of Noah. Shall those, then, whom the arm of omnipotent grace has snatched from the fatal flood, rest unconcerned while millions are sinking around. "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death,—if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul doth he not know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?" My brethren, thousands of your countrymen, and millions of your fellow-men are drawn unto death, and you cannot even say, "Behold we knew it not." If then, we refuse to care for their state, will not he who pondereth the heart consider, and he that keepeth the soul, will not he know it? and as we have refused to deliver the soul of our brother, will he not refuse to keep our souls? Has not the voice of inspiration said, "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Much more then, may we conclude that the love of God never entered the heart of him, who, seeing his brother ready to perish for ever, and possessing the means of affording relief, refuses to afford it.

But I will not suppose that you need to be urged by motives of this nature. Appealing to your compassion, rather than to your fears, I will ask, If a Saviour had never been provided for the world, and could wealth or suffering procure such a blessing, what, with your present views of the spiritual state of mankind, would you give, what would you suffer, to purchase it for them; to draw down an all-sufficient Saviour from heaven, with pardon, and peace, and salvation, in his hands? Would any sacrifices, any sufferings appear too great for the attainment of such an object? My brethren, without making great sacrifices, without any personal sufferings, you can, in an important sense, do this. The situation of those who are destitute of the gospel is in effect the same, as if a Saviour had never been revealed. In vain, as it respects them, have the glad tidings of great joy reached our world. In vain have life and immortality been brought to light, and the gates of heaven opened. Of these wonders of redeeming love, of the only name given under heaven whereby men can be saved, they have never heard. He then, who shall send them the gospel, will instrumentally provide for them a Saviour, snatch them from perdition, and give them life and immortality.

He who restores sight to one that is blind, not only gives him eyes, but does in effect give him the luminaries of heaven, the colours which adorn the earth, the beauties of nature and of art; in a word, all the benefits which the faculty of seeing imparts. So he who sends the gospel to the destitute, gives them Christ, gives them a Saviour, and all the blessings which that Saviour has purchased. O what gifts, what blessings are these to be dispensed with a mortal hand. Who will not spring forward with eagerness to share the privilege of dispensing such treasures? Who will not thank that God, who thus allows us to imitate himself?—to share with

him the happiness of doing infinite good? Compared with this privilege, even the miraculous powers of the apostles, which gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead, shrink into insignificance. We may place a Saviour, a heaven within the reach, not of one only, but of thousands. It may be fairly presumed, that every pious, indigent youth, who is educated for the ministry, will preach the gospel to at least a thousand souls. The question, then, whether the means necessary for his preparation shall be afforded, comes to this; Shall a thousand immortal souls be favoured with the gospel, or possibly live and die, and perish without it? What a question is this for the consideration of accountable beings! Is there, can there be any doubt respecting the proper answer?

Again; reasoning from what has taken place within a few years, it is not perhaps too much to suppose, that every pious and well-educated youth, who is introduced into the sacred ministry, will be instrumental of the conversion and salvation of one hundred persons. These, in their turn, will prove instruments of converting and saving others: some of whom may also become ministers, and preach the gospel to thousands after we are laid in dust. Thus the happy effects produced by one whom we assist to educate, like a river widening as it runs, will flow down to posterity, and produce consequences which finite minds cannot estimate. Compared with such results, how worthless, how insignificant does wealth appear! And yet, when employed in bringing about these results, how unspeakable is its value! Viewed in this light, it is the most valuable of all temporal gifts which Providence bestows: more valuable even than intellectual talents, or literary acquirements; since he who possesses it may call into the service of Christ greater talents than any one man ever possessed. He may exert a power over minds little less than creative. He may call from the poverty and obscurity in which it now lies, the most vigorous intellect; may develop its energies; cause its faculties to expand and brighten; and send it forth to promote, beyond all calculation, the glory of God and the happiness of men; he may thus prepare it to shine hereafter with a great multitude of others, as the brightness of the firmament and as the stars for ever and ever. What, my hearers, is the building of a palace, a pyramid, or a city, in comparison with the erection of such a pillar as this in the temple of our God above?

Learn then, O learn, ye wealthy, the true value of riches! Learn it at the foot of Immanuel's cross. Learn it of him to whose words we have been attending; and who by that cross was crucified to the world, and the world to him. Were he now on earth and possessed of your wealth, to what end would he apply it? But the example is too bright for the imitation, almost too dazzling even for the eye of this cool, calculating age. Christianity, at least as she exists in our hearts, seems to feel, in common with men, the contracting influence of old age, and to have lost the sympathetic, compassionate ardour, which warmed her youthful bosom. O to see her once more in her pristine form, adorned with the beauty, and strong with the vigour of renovated youth; breathing that fervent benevolence

which she inspired when she first descended from the bosom of Infinite Love; when, not wealth, but blood, was the price paid for the privilege of communicating her blessings to an ungrateful world; and when that price was paid by her disciples more cheerfully than a small portion of wealth is given now. Blessed be God, some symptoms of this desirable renovation begin to appear. Christianity, as it exists at the present day, resembles, in some faint degree, Christianity as it glowed in the breasts of apostles and martyrs. But, brethren, let us strive to make the resemblance more perfect. Let us convince mankind that our heaven-born religion still glows with the ardour of youth, still breathes the angelic sentiment, *Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, and good will to men.* And let us never forget, that our approximation to the standard of primitive Christianity, must be estimated by the degree in which we make Christ, and his cause, all and in all, and manifest a readiness to do all things, to suffer all things, and to part with all things for his sake.

SERMON XXIX.

By AUSTIN DICKINSON, A M.

SCRIPTURAL MEASURE OF BENEVOLENT EFFORT.

HEBREWS, XII. 16.—*To do good, and to communicate, forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*

Who that expects to meet the Lord Jesus in the heavens, and to reign with him for ever, would not rejoice to be able to say, *I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work thou hast given me to do?* But the question is sometimes asked, How much are we required to do, that we may finish our course with joy? The best answer to this question, is that touching eulogy of the Saviour, *She hath done what she could.* It is to be feared, however, that many, even of those who bear the name of Christ, and hope to share his eternal glory, have not yet come to any settled conviction, that they are bound to do all they can to advance his kingdom. To such persons we would suggest a few thoughts on the Duty, the Privilege, and the Manner of contributing for this great object.

I. As it respects the Duty:

Your relation to the great Redeemer and Judge, as *accountable stewards of his bounty*, makes it your duty to work for his glory, and for the advancement of his kingdom among men. *What hast thou that thou didst not receive?* Your talents, your property, all your opportunities of usefulness, are from God. He has given them, or rather loaned them to you, for a few fleeting years, and expects you to give account of the purposes for which you improve or abuse them.

By the very nature of your Christian profession, you are also solemnly bound to devote yourself and your possessions for the advancement of Christ's kingdom. In entering into covenant with his church, if you do it heartily—if you do it without gross hypocrisy—you make a voluntary sur-

render of yourself and of your all to Christ: you promise before God, angels, and men, to be *the Lord's*. With the vows of God on your conscience, then, you are virtually pledged to do what you can for advancing his kingdom; not merely in your own soul; but in the souls of others to whom your influence may extend. The primitive Christians not only professed, but actually exemplified this spirit of Christ. The apostles "counted not their *lives* dear unto them, so that they might testify the gospel of the grace of God." And their first converts did not hesitate to make great sacrifices to aid those intrepid missionaries in rescuing others from the darkness of heathenism, and from the damnation of hell. "As many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet." How many a modern professor, though rich, would shrink with disgust from the suggestion of his *selling lands* for a like holy purpose! But the man, who will let a sinner go down to the second death, rather than part with lands or money to save him, has not the spirit of Him who died for sinners. He does not love his neighbour as himself. He has not the spirit that reigns in heaven.

A proper regard for the honour of Christ and his Church, also, binds you to be conspicuous, according to your ability, in exertions and sacrifices to advance the Gospel. If, by wilfully withholding, you give the world occasion to say, 'that you are as selfish, covetous, worldly-minded, as they are;' you thus bring reproach and shame, not merely on yourself, but on the sacred name of Christ. You thereby cause many to "blaspheme that worthy name." But if, on the other hand, you show before an ungodly world, that you really regard the honour of Christ and the eternal interests of man,—you thus compel others to admire the benevolent spirit of the Gospel; and perhaps lead many to unite in glorifying its Author.

You are bound, likewise, by *infinite obligations of gratitude* to the Saviour, to do what you can to extend his Gospel. O, think of the eternal height of that throne from which He descended; think of the dreadful curse of God to which He submitted; think of those endless agonies from which He redeemed you; think of that eternal weight of glory to which He invites you; and estimate, if you can, your obligations to the Saviour: and then, act worthy of Him who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

The *value of immortal souls* should also stimulate and compel you to make great sacrifices, if by any means you may enlighten and save some. You know that many millions, now on the earth, are involved in gross idolatry and crime; ignorant of the only true God and of the only Saviour. You know that every one of them has a soul, that, like your own, must live and expand for ever. You know that every one of them, by being furnished with Living Bread, and growing for ever in the knowledge and likeness of God, is capable of inconceivably more happiness, than has yet been enjoyed by all created beings in the universe;—or by sinking for ever in guilt, is capable of more misery, than has yet been endured by all the millions that have lived on earth or in hell. All past enjoyments or sufferings of all creatures in heaven, earth, or hell, have been but *temporary*: they can, there-

fore, bear no comparison with the bliss or wo of one soul, measured by *Eternity*. Every soul of every sinner on earth, then, is immeasurably precious. And you know that the *New Testament in Christ's blood*, if received in faith, can prepare idolaters, as well as you, to stand faultless before the throne; and to become partakers of that "exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But "how shall they believe in Him, of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent?"

Viewing yourself, then, as a *steward of God's bounty*—pledged by a *Christian profession*—inseparably connected with the *honour of Christ*—bound to Him by *infinite obligations*—and surrounded by *millions*, each of them *more precious than worlds*—does not the *Duty* of exertions to save them bear upon you with infinite weight? Under such responsibilities, must lands, or houses, or money, or family advancement, or ignoble ease, be your chief desire? Must your immortal mind, your heaven-born spirit, be here wrapt up in *selfishness* and *local interest*? Or shall it embrace the human family as a common brotherhood; and *do what it can*, to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus?

II. But, to contribute for the advancement of Christ's kingdom is not merely a *Duty*;—it is a glorious *PRIVILEGE*.

The habit of giving with a proper spirit, tends continually to *widen and elevate the mind*. By employing our hearts and hands in works of charity, we become co-workers with God—we share in the honour of executing His benevolent plans—we become associates with those loftier "spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." By such employment our character is elevated in the scale of intellectual and moral beings. We take a higher rank among the creatures of God; and are qualifying ourselves, by healthful exercise, for still more elevated and more honourable employment in His kingdom of glory;—qualifying to become kings and priests unto God for ever and ever.

The habit of contributing, with a proper spirit, is a source of purest enjoyment to the giver: and the more expansive his benevolence, the more does his felicity resemble that of the SUPREME. He, whose heart has glowed with benevolence from eternity, and who, in return, has received the homage and gratitude of uncounted millions—He, who knows what of pleasure or of pain has dwelt in every bosom—He hath testified, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*. And every man, who, in the spirit of Christ, has eminently contributed to bless the world, will heartily respond to this testimony. If we look abroad among our acquaintance, we find, perhaps, one among a thousand, who is evidently *living not to himself*; but whose mind is ever contriving, or whose hand is labouring to augment the means of spiritual blessedness; and we involuntarily pronounce him *the happiest man among the thousand*. He is happy in life and in death. For while with one hand he scatters blessings on the world he is leaving, with the other he reaches forth to an unfading crown, and to imperishable riches at God's right hand. But, O Death! how terrible art thou to that man who is at ease in his possessions! who loveth them more than his neighbour or

his God! and, O Eternity! Eternity! how long and how dismal will be the period of thy revolutions to that man who *trusts in these uncertain riches; and is not rich towards God!*

III. To those who feel, in some measure, the Duty and the Privilege of contributing to advance the Gospel, we would say as to the *Manner*;

In the first place, as far as the nature of the case will admit, *have some settled plan, or system*, in regard to the amount and particular objects of your religious charities. Every man, of common intelligence, feels the importance of previous arrangement, and order, in the management of his *temporal* concerns. How then, without guilt, can he be content to have no system in this important work? It might be of incalculable use to the individual, as well as to the general cause of benevolence, if each Christian would, at the commencement of the year, sit down; and, with the map of the world and the realities of eternity before him, make a solemn consecration of such amount, or of such proportion of his income, as, in sober judgment, he *can* contribute during the year. In such a transaction he would not dare deliberately to put off God with a pittance. Or rather, I should say, in such holy intimacy with the God of benevolence, he would feel his heart new-opened—he would have no disposition to stipulate in penurious measure. Such special acts of consecration are repeatedly recommended by Scriptural precept and example. “Vow, and pay unto the Lord, your God: Let all that be round about him bring presents unto Him that ought to be feared.” “And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on; then shall the Lord be my God; and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto thee.” It is impossible not to regard with unqualified respect the few instances of a similar character known at the present day. And were such examples common in the Churches, we should witness a much stronger and steadier flame of benevolent enterprise. Prone, as God knows even good men are, to pervert His gifts for *selfish* purposes, He does very properly require of them a special bond—a solemn, irrevocable covenant—devoting a reasonable portion for His service and glory.

As preparatory to the foregoing, it would not be amiss, especially for those who complain of frequent calls, to make a little estimate of what they have given the year past, and to compare the amount with what has been needlessly or wickedly expended! O, shrink not from this estimate, however mortifying to spiritual pride; for a full reckoning must one day be made, under circumstances infinitely more solemn: and then wo unto him who now *dealeth with himself deceitfully*.

In contributing for the spread of the Gospel, it is likewise important, as far as possible, to *act in concert with others*, in regard to the time of giving, and the particular objects to be accomplished. Union is strength. And human nature, in all, is so constituted as to be powerfully influenced by example. It is for this reason that we are commanded to “let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father who is in heaven.” The well known example of a *certain poor widow who cast*

in two miles, has exerted an influence, for eighteen hundred years throughout the Christian world; and will continue to do so, till the consummation of all things. Let no individual, then, presume to say, that his example is unimportant: for God, who seeth not as man seeth, can cause the humblest offering to give new impulse to the charities of a neighbourhood, or nation.

It is important, likewise, to maintain *uniformity* in the practice of giving, whenever there is a reasonable expectation. For, one individual, by withholding, may dampen the ardour of many. And the most generous benefactor may suffer materially in his character, and thus injure the general cause, if on some occasions he exhibit a total want of kindly feeling, and incur, whether justly or not, the charge of *meanness*.

In addition to pecuniary gifts, every person, however limited his influence may seem to be, should inquire seriously, in what manner his peculiar circumstances, or talents, may enable him to advance the Gospel. Some may combine the industry of a neighbourhood, or of an extensive circle of acquaintance, in works of Charity. Some have the tongue of persuasion, or the pen of a ready writer, and may enkindle others

"With thoughts that breathe and words that burn."

Some, by a word fitly spoken, may, with the blessing of God, put it into the heart of a single family, here and there, to support a Missionary, or to educate a Christian Minister. Some, by the extensive circulation of a Tract, or other Religious Publication, may accomplish a thousand fold more, than by pecuniary gifts. In almost every village, there is perhaps some one individual, who, by a little self-denying effort, might bring all its families under the influence of Periodical intelligence; and thus, indirectly, aid all our benevolent institutions. Every individual, male or female, by occupying the talent which God has given, may secure that blest eulogium, *She hath done what she could*. At present, the impression is very general that some five or ten years hence, we shall look back with surprise on the little that is now doing. A plain confession that, with all our self-complacency, we are very far from *doing what we could*; and are therefore verily *guilty*. At the same time, according to the usual ratio of deaths, in less than ten years, about THREE HUNDRED MILLIONS of our race must pass into eternity—most of them now ignorant of the *only Name given under heaven, whereby men can be saved*. Who, then, that knows these facts, can refrain from new and memorable efforts for spreading the knowledge of Jesus Christ?

Finally; *what thou doest, do quickly*: for time is on the wing. *This year thou shalt die. This night thy soul may be required of thee*. Thousands are dying every hour: And soon will the Judge descend with power and great glory, to reward every man according to his works. This will be the rule of evidence on that great day. And no other is needful, for now settling the question, whether you be in Christ, a new creature. Here is room for demonstration, what God you are serving—for what world you are preparing—what is your great object of pursuit—what your rule of action—what your heart. And here may be at once decided, what shall be your transport or terror, when the heavens and the earth are shaken by the voice of the arch-angel and by the trump of God.